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ABSTRACT

Project COMPETE (Community-based Model for Public School Exit and Transition to Employment) was a federally funded service demonstration project to investigate new procedures for secondary education and transition services for youth with moderate, severe, and profound mental retardation. The goal of Project COMPETE was to develop and validate a model for assisting the youth to make the transition from school to employment in the most competitive environment possible. The project focused specifically on establishing formal linkages between the public school system, the rehabilitation center, and other community-based agencies, with clear delineations of responsibilities involved in delivery of services. Under the COMPETE model, rehabilitation center staff and area vocational rehabilitation counselors participate in public school case conferences. In addition to development of the model, Project COMPETE developed a model of cooperative transition planning, a labor market survey, and a taxonomy of community living skills; conducted staff training sessions; and produced 11 working papers about the project. (JDD)

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Project COMPETE:

Community-Based Model for Public School Exit and Transition to Employment

FINAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EC 212144

Project COMPETE was a service demonstration project funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to investigate new procedures for secondary education and transition services for severely handicapped youth. The project was a cooperative effort between the Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped, at Indiana University at Bloomington, and Developmental Services, Inc., and the Bartholomew Special Services Cooperative, both in Columbus, Indiana.

The goal of Project COMPETE was to develop and validate a model for assisting severely handicapped (i.e., moderately, severely and profoundly retarded) youth to make the transition from school to employment in the most competitive environment possible. The COMPETE model focused specifically on establishing formal linkages between the public school system, the rehabilitation center, and other community-based agencies. The goal of the project was to ensure a totally integrated continuum of preparation from the intermediate through the post-secondary level.

Table 1 presents a list of the original objectives for Project COMPETE. Every one of these objectives was met during the course of the project, and Project COMPETE can be considered a success.

Project Accomplishments

Two major service delivery agencies, the public schools and the rehabilitation center, must provide continuous, integrated and coherent programming in order for vocational training of severely handicapped youth to be effective. The major thrust of Project COMPETE was to create a fundamental change in the service delivery system by developing and

implementing a model for cross-agency programming to assist severely handicapped youth to move from school to work.

The vehicle for the cooperative programming is the Individual Transition Program (ITP) planning process. Under the COMPETE model, staff from the rehabilitation center begin to participate in the public school case conferences when the severely handicapped youth are age 12. At this time initial plans are developed to provide community vocational training for the child, and explanations are provided to the parents relative to the child's future vocational training in high school. Then, when the students are age 15, area Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors begin to participate in the case conferences in order to develop plans for the actions to be taken by VR, and to assist in the community integration process. Before COMPETE began, students in the classes for the severely handicapped in Bartholomew and Jackson Counties would go to the sheltered workshop for half days, where they would learn to be "sheltered employees". Now, however, they are being trained to perform a number of jobs in community settings prior to the time they leave school. Thus, their work training has moved from a more restrictive to a far less restrictive environment.

As a result of this project, the COMPETE model is now being used to guide vocational programming for severely handicapped youth in two counties in Southern Indiana: Bartholomew and Jackson. Three major agencies have agreed to follow the model: the public schools, the local rehabilitation center, and the local Vocational Rehabilition agencies. The public schools automatically notify the rehabilitation center and VR counselors of upcoming case conferences at which transition plans will

be made and modified as necessary. Vocational evaluations are completed when the student/clients are age 16, at which time VR files are opened on each young person in the program. Initial work training and work experience in community jobs is provided by the public school staff. When the student/clients enter the senior year, however, rehabilitation center staff assume responsibility for their work training, and place them into community jobs for training in competitive employment. Following graduation, additional work training, competitive placements and followalong services are provided as needed by the rehabilitation center staff.

Under the COMPETE model, the public schools provide: vocational exploration; training in work habits and attitudes needed for entering training in work environments; training in underlying clusters of work and work-related skills; and work experiences. The rehabilitation center provides: addditional job-related interpersonal skills training; specific vocational skill training required for competitive employment; required support services for maintaining employment; and identification and coordination of additional support services provided by other agencies such as Mental Health, Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Job Training Partnership Act Agencies.

Accomplishments and Products

Not only did Project COMPETE develop an effective model for a service delivery system, a number of other products grew from the efforts to implement the project:

Cooperative Transition Process. The COMPETE model of cooperative programming is now in place and continues to operate beyond the time

limits of the project. Whereas program planning was previously carried out by individual agencies without respect to events that transpire outside each agency, programming is now coherent and continuous. Vocational training events in the public schools now start at early ages, and lead directly into training events conducted by the rehabilitation agencies in the senior year of high school and beyond. Information flows between the public schools, the rehabilitation centers and the VR agencies smoothly and continuously, and effective vocational training is being conducted to the benefit of the severely handicapped student/clients. The success of the program offers a model of service delivery to other agencies in the state, region, and nation.

Labor Market Survey. A major product of the project was a survey of employers in Bartholomew and Jackson Counties. This survey (a) identified stable jobs in these counties that severely handicapped individuals could perform; (b) identified potential employers of severely handicapped individuals; and (c) evaluated the perceptions of potential employers relative to characteristics of workers who would be hired and maintained in these jobs. This information not only provided a pool of employers for job training and work placements, but also showed that employers were largely concerned with work habits, attitudes, and interpersonal skills of workers. The latter information allowed the development of instructional programs for both the school system and the rehabilitation center. This survey has been replicated by another local rehabilitation agency, under the guidance of COMPETE Staff, in Monroe, Lawrence and Owen Counties in Southern Indiana. Thus, the techniques

employed by Project COMPETE to carry out the labor market analyses have proven useful and are now available to other agencies.

Taxonomy of Community Living Skills. Another major product developed in this project is the Taxonomy of Community Living Skills. This product provides a comprehensive set of instructional goals for community integration training programs for severely handicapped persons. The skills listed in the vocational domain provide instructional goals for vocational training programs, while the skills listed in the other four domains (Personal Maintenance and Development, Homemaking and Community Life, Leisure, and Travel) provide instructional goals for other community living programs. This taxonomy is being published in the Monograph Series of the American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Staff Training. In addition to the above products, an extensive amount of time was spent in training staff at various sites. A large number of group and individual staff training sessions were conducted. These sessions provided the conceptual foundation for the systems change that has been instituted. Training was provided not only for the school and rehabilitation center staff who provide direct student/client training, but also for principals, rehabilitation center administrators, local and regional VR personnel, state agency personnel, and service providers and administrators from other agencies in the state and region.

Working Papers. Finally, a total of eleven working papers were developed by Project COMPETE Staff. These have been advertised regarding

their availability in major special education sources. They are as follows:

(#85-1) A Taxonomy of Instructional Objectives for Developmentally Disabled Persons: Vocational Domain.

(#85-2) A Taxonomy of Instructional Objectives for Developmentally Disabled Persons: Personal Maintenance and Development; Homemaking and Community Life; Leisure; and Travel Domains.

(#85-3) Conducting A Labor Market Trend Analysis: Process and Results.

(#85-4) Conducting An Analysis of Community Work Environments Relative to the Employment of Severely Handicapped Persons.

(#85-5) Experimental Curriculum for Classes for Severely and Profoundly Retarded Learners.

(#85-6) An Analysis of Employer Rankings Relative to the Employment of Retarded Persons.

(#87-1) (Position Paper) Effective Transition Programming for Severely Handicapped Individuals.

(#87-2) Severely Handicapped Youth Competing in the Labor Market: Implementation and Effectiveness Report From the First Two Years of Project COMPETE.

(#87-3) An Analysis of Occupational Requirements Relative to the Employment of Severely Handicapped Individuals.

(#87-4) A National Survey on the Taxonomy of Community Living Skills.

(#87-5) Evaluating Work Performance by Severely Handicapped Students in Work Experience Settings.

(87-6) A survey of Parent Perceptions of Work Training for their Severely Handicapped Children

Summary

It is clear that the project accomplished what it set out to accomplish, and that it can be considered a success by any measure. A new service delivery system is now in place and operating in Bartholomew

and Jackson Counties in Southern Indiana. It is predicated on a set of procedures for providing multi-agency, cooperative, comunity-based vocational programming for individuals with severe handicaps. As such, it provides an operating model for other communities. The staff of project COMPETE is pleased to present this final report to OSERS, and welcomes comment and questions from all who would like to contact us.